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## AN APPEAL TO OUR MILLIONAIRES.

BY X.

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THE American people, like most other peoples of which we have knowledge, may be roughly divided into three classes—those who have much more money than is good for them, those who have perhaps as much money as is good for them, and those who have much less money than would be good for them. The first class is numerically small; the second class is larger but still small; and the third class is vastly larger than both the others together. As each voter in this country at this time has exactly the same voice in the government as every other voter, the laws regulating the acquisition and descent of property must sooner or later conform to the views of the voters of the third class,—that is to say, the voters who actually earn the bread they eat by the labor of their own hands, and whose lives are passed in that unceasing circulation of sorrow, where hard, daily toil sometimes provides, and sometimes fails to provide, the necessities of life for the toiler and those dependent upon him.

As the object of this article is to endeavor to persuade the possessors of “surplus wealth” to assist those of us who desire, as they desire, a conservative administration of our common government to secure, if possible, a continuance of such administration, it may be useful to preface the consideration of the subject

with the opinion of one of the wisest and most conservative members of the illustrious company of great American statesmen. Daniel Webster, with unerring sagacity, foresaw the marvellous era of material prosperity which awaited this country, owing to the beneficent gifts of Providence to it, when we entered into effective possession of the illimitable resources of the entire continent, and, after forecasting such great wealth for us, he added:

“The freest government, if it could exist, would not be long acceptable if the tendency of the laws was to create a rapid accumulation of property in a few hands. In the nature of things, those who have not property and see their neighbors possessed of much more than they think them to need cannot be favorable to laws made for the protection of such property. When this class becomes numerous, it grows clamorous. It looks on property as its prey and plunder, and is naturally ready at all times for violence and revolution. It would seem, then, to be the part of political wisdom to found government on property, but to establish such distribution of property, by the laws which regulate its transmission and alienation, as to interest the great majority of society in the support of the government.”

The exact condition mentioned by Mr. Webster is the condition which confronts the American people to-day—that of “a rapid accumulation of property in a few hands”; and it ought to be possible for us to agree to follow his advice, and at least to endeavor to establish such distribution of property, by the laws which regulate its transmission and alienation, as to interest the great majority of society in the support of the government. That, indeed, would seem to be, in view of the existing and ever-increasing hostility to “surplus wealth,” the one question now of supreme importance for discussion and decision. By its side, all the other questions under public discussion are of little or no importance.

The working-man—who constitutes a great majority—really does not much care whether New Mexico and Arizona are linked together or not; nor whether the sugar and tobacco of the Philippines pay one rate of duty or another; nor whether the rates on railways shall be regulated by a commission or by the courts; nor whether hides shall come in free or pay a duty; nor whether some Jew bankers in Europe shall rob the poverty-stricken inhabitants of Santo Domingo; nor whether the canal at Panama shall be at sea-level or with locks; nor whether a few thousand more or less undesirable immigrants shall be excluded; nor

whether a dozen more or less incompetent consuls shall be supplanted. All these are admirable subjects for academic discussion by the President and Congress, but they interest hardly anybody outside of Washington, unless his pecuniary interests may be affected by their decision; whereas, the working-man all over the land is every day being told that the great fortunes of our millionaires have been dishonestly accumulated and are for him a constant menace and oppression.

The evil effects of billions of money in a few hands upon the masses of the people, as foretold by Mr. Webster, are therefore gravely aggravated, it must always be remembered, by the general belief that "the rapid accumulation of property in a few hands" has been the result of immoral and illegal practices on the part of its possessors. They are assured, in season and out of season, that its possessors have organized trusts to crush competition; that they have corrupted traffic-managers of railways to secure rebates; and that they have corrupted Congressmen to secure tariff schedules for their advantage; while other millionaires are pointed out as having corrupted aldermen to give them for nothing franchises in the streets belonging to the people; and other equally abhorrent ways are stated as having been the means for the acquisition of these disproportionate fortunes. For the purpose of this argument, it may be taken for granted that these accusations are not all well founded; but they all have secured a lodgment in the minds of many good people, and whoever doubts this fact can readily satisfy himself of it by looking at random at half a dozen of our leading newspapers or half a dozen of our most widely circulated magazines, not to speak of many speeches in both Houses of Congress and some suggestive allusions to the subject by President Roosevelt. A writer of established reputation is just reported as declaring that many of our millionaires are corruptionists, contributors to campaign funds to buy betrayals of public trusts, and "worse than any pirate flying the black flag on the high seas."

Perhaps the most important fact about these accusations is that they have now permeated what, in the matter of wealth, may be called our middle class, composed of those who are not rich enough to be envied and yet who are not poor enough to be pitied. A significant illustration of the extension of this prejudice to this class is found in an illuminating cartoon recently published in

a certain weekly periodical whose circulation is limited, alike by its price and its contents, to well-to-do and cultivated people. In sarcastic allusion to the changes which have come over us since Washington was born, it gave a picture of a dinner in honor of his birthday, of which the unctuous host was labelled "Trust" and his dozen dropsical and unattractive guests were labelled with the actual names of our leading capitalists. Almost at the same time, twelve American citizens, presumably also of the middle class, and sworn jurors in a court of justice, declared by their verdict that the odious offence of kidnapping an innocent child was not to be regarded as a crime if the victim of it was the child of a millionaire; and, about the same time, a telegram appeared stating that a learned gentleman had addressed so conservative a body as a club composed of members of the Presbyterian Church upon the subject: "Why Great Fortunes in America Are a Positive Menace to the Public Welfare."

Innumerable other instances could be given, but surely these are sufficient, to show that the persons to whom this appeal is addressed ought, without delay, to take into thoughtful and careful consideration the question, whether it is not now to their own true interest to join such of their fellow citizens as are absolutely free from envy of their wealth, and absolutely devoid of unkind feelings towards them, in trying to discover whether there is any practical method of alleviating, and, if possible, removing, the rapidly growing dissatisfaction with their continued possession of the vast sums of money which they have either themselves abstracted from the common store of all the people or which they have inherited from ancestors who had so abstracted them. For all the property of a free nation belongs to its inhabitants, and whoever abstracts anything from it must, when challenged, prove his right to what he has taken.

Of course, our millionaires share with the rest of us a natural dislike for unsolicited advice, nor are they very likely to regard as of any great importance opinions of themselves, their doings and their duties, expressed by anybody who is not of their own class, and particularly by a person who is not a "captain" of some kind of honest or dishonest industry or of some kind of honest or dishonest finance, and who is therefore incapable of ever becoming one of their class; and suggestions to them, as to how best to treat any dangers which seem to be threatening our

political and social system from their great possessions, might well appear to them an impertinence when offered by an outsider studying such subjects in a detached and disinterested manner, "far from the madding crowd" where, while you wait, trusts are formed, railroads are bought and sold, and bonds and stocks of water are ladled out to a thirsty public.

And yet if such suggestions are absolutely free from any taint of selfishness and are the result of careful study of "the condition, not the theory," which is soon again to confront the country as it did in 1896, and possibly, indeed, with far greater chances of success; and if the conclusions forced upon such a student of the incongruous elements of our political, industrial and social life are honestly reached, without uncharitableness, they may well be worthy of thoughtful consideration. For, while our millionaires are a small fraction of our population, they constitute just now "the storm centre" of it, and for this simple reason,—that, whether truly or untruly, they are believed to have managed, in more or less forbidden ways, to withdraw from their fellow countrymen much more of the common property of the nation than is really good for them, or for their children, and these vast accumulations of money in a few hands are thought to be of very evil import for our country.

Now, if it is really true that the holding of such vast sums of wealth, without any generally recognized moral title to them, by a comparatively small number of persons is of evil omen for our political and social peace, nobody is so deeply interested in knowing the fact as our millionaires themselves, nor is there good reason for supposing that they would be less willing than any equal number of their countrymen to take whatever steps they were convinced were necessary on their part to advance the general welfare.

If it should clearly appear to them that, alike as good men and as good citizens, they ought to disencumber themselves of a goodly portion of the wealth they or their ancestors have accumulated, no doubt ought to be entertained that they would so disencumber themselves; nor can there be any doubt that with their great practical sagacity they would find the least objectionable and most effective method of doing so. They are, indeed, only the children of their epoch,—they are only what we and the times in which we live have assisted to make them. They

sometimes wander so far astray as to come under the observation of those who have little in common with them, and such slight and casual contact often satisfies observers of honest minds that they compare very favorably, as true lovers of their kind and their country, with those of us whose lot is of plainer living; and it is with such favorable opinions of the class under consideration, though with no concealment of their grave responsibilities for the dangers which seem now to threaten them and us, that the subject will be pursued.

We must also always remember that we have treated our millionaires, young and old and of both sexes, most unfairly. For a long while we unduly flattered them, and now we have suddenly relapsed into bitter hostility to them. It is not long since the entire class were fully justified in the insolent cynicism which led them to believe themselves objects of general admiration, simply because they had "money to burn." Newspapers printed their photographs and chronicled their movements, treating them, and even their children, as semi-official or semi-royal personages. Elaborate descriptions were published of their gorgeous homes in town and country; their castles in Europe; the gowns and jewels of their wives and daughters, their yachts, their four-in-hands, their monster motor-cars; the wasteful extravagance of their entertainments; and even the fabulous prices they paid for music to entertain empty-headed guests. A periodical actually flourished, and to it they gave large sums of money, which was largely devoted to silly flattery or salacious gossip about them and their doings, including their real and supposed violations of the Seventh Commandment.

This admiration was freely extended even to those members of the class who expended their money in mere silly indulgence of themselves and their poorer satellites in luxury and public ostentation, while those of them who made contributions to libraries or universities, or any other public object, were praised as if they were giving at some real sacrifice to themselves and were benefactors of mankind.

It is quite true that ordinary wisdom ought to have warned our millionaires that this state of mind could not long continue, and that they should use their "surplus wealth" so as not to unnecessarily inflame the minds of their less fortunate fellow citizens.

One does not wave a red flag in the face of a bull unless he has good reasons for wishing to inflame the bull; but, unfortunately, our millionaires, and especially their idle and degenerate children, have been flaunting their money in the faces of the poor as if actually wishing to provoke them to that insensate rage which is akin to madness, and leads "to murder and the breaking up of laws." In the sweep of a great current, it is foolish to exaggerate the influence of a small rivulet which joins it, but let us consider for a moment one matter of very minor importance, except as showing an apparent actual desire on the part of the rich to draw upon themselves the hatred of the poor. The motor-engine is not only a most valuable invention for many purposes, but it offers those rich enough to afford it a very attractive mode of travel, and has undoubtedly not only come to stay, but to increase rapidly in use, as it ought. When cars are of a size proportioned to the width of the highway on which they run and are propelled at moderate speed, they are used without serious danger or discomfort to any other person using the highway or living beside it. Nobody has ever been hurt or seriously annoyed by an automobile of proportionate size going at ten miles an hour. But the rich prefer to buy immense cars which take almost all of a narrow street or road, and to drive them on all streets and roads, narrow or wide, at such speed as imperils the lives and limbs of everybody in their path; and merely for their own selfish pleasure they afflict the poor and their children, well or ill, in their wayside homes, with offensive noise and clatter and more offensive odor, and cover them with thick layers of dust, as they do all the travellers they pass; and they actually kill other people on the highway if they are not able to run fast enough to escape them,—and then the great car speeds away. "The Sun" of New York reported the other day the killing of two aged women and one child; on another day two children were killed; on another day one child was killed and a laboring man with his dinner-pail on his arm. The newspapers this morning report the running down of two working-men on their way to work and a Catholic priest on his way to church. Since New-Year's Day these great cars, simply for the pleasure of their occupants, have killed more people on the public highways than were killed in the war with Spain.

Of course, there is nothing novel in this form of showing con-



tempt by the rich for the rights of the poor on the public highways. Here is a sketch, by a master hand, of a parallel scene in Paris, just before France was drenched in the blood of her "wealthy classes":

"With a wild rattle and clatter the carriage dashed through the streets and swept round corners with women screaming before it, and men clutching each other and clutching children out of its way. At last, swooping by a street corner, at a fountain, one of its wheels came to a sickening little jolt, and there was a loud cry and the horses reared and plunged. But for this the carriage probably would not have stopped, for carriages often drove on and left their wounded or killed behind them. 'What has gone wrong?' asked the Marquis, calmly looking out. 'A child has been killed,' was the answer, and he replied: 'It is extraordinary to me that you people cannot take care of yourselves and your children. One or the other of you is forever in the way!' and then the Marquis drove on to his grand château. But in the morning he was dead with the knife of the dead child's father in his heart."

Changing "carriage" to "motor-car," how much all this reads like an incident of to-day,—except that here, fortunately, we are in no danger of the taking of life for life.

While, therefore, our millionaires and their children may be justly blamed for their part in causing this change in the public attitude towards them, causing them to be objects of ever-increasing hatred to great numbers of the people, we must also take upon ourselves a very considerable portion of the blame for it. It was our plain duty to have warned them, and especially the young degenerates of the class, that the newly rich have in all ages, by their vulgar ostentation of their wealth, made themselves not only the shining mark of the satirist, but also sooner or later objects of general dislike. We should have told them that the sudden possession of unearned millions of money had always exercised a most disastrous effect upon weak minds. It had done so in Athens and in Rome, and it was certain to have the same disastrous effect upon weak minds here.

We did nothing of the kind, however, but sat idly by, apparently expecting that they would possess American common sense and be restrained by it from such follies in this country and at this age of the world.

The most important fact, indeed, about the possession of private property to-day, is that the world has moved "out of night into

light," away from the days of despotism and privilege, and that it is now securely anchored in the democratic ages. Let us seriously consider what this means; and, above all, do not let any of our millionaires suppose that he can escape from the democratic ages by migrating to any other civilized country. The sudden appearance of over fifty Labor members in the British House of Commons clearly shows that the men who labor with their hands will at no distant day be in practical possession of the government of that country, while the rapid growth of Socialism in Germany indicates the approach of the same great change there, and it has already arrived in all the Latin countries.

Now, what are the bulwarks of private property in the imperial commonwealth of New York, where so much of it is situated? As to incomes, nobody will have the effrontery to deny that, if the majority of the voters choose to elect a Governor of their own way of thinking and a majority in both houses of the Legislature, they can readily enact a progressive taxation of incomes which will limit every citizen of New York State to such income as the majority of the voters consider sufficient for him.

It is, if possible, even less likely that anybody will deny that, in order to effectually turn every dollar of the property of every decedent into the public treasury at his death, no affirmative legislation is necessary. It is only necessary to repeal the statutes now authorizing the descent of such property to the heirs and legatees of the decedent. It is perfectly apparent, therefore, that there is no ultimate security for a single dollar of private property in New York, and precisely the same statement is true of all other American States, except such as a majority of the voters may decide to be just and wise, both to the possessors of such property and to the community at large. Nor, for reasons which there is not room now to detail, can any substantial protection be obtained from the National Government. Even if any constitutional provision stood in the way, it could be removed by the same majority of voters whenever they chose to do so.

If an agitation was started for such legislation, there would be at least a serious probability that it would succeed, for the dissatisfaction with great fortunes seems to be rapidly increasing, both in extent and in intensity. To prove this it is unnecessary

to have recourse to what might be regarded as the wild and reckless statements of sensational newspapers or sensational agitators. Such statements ought not, however, to be wholly disregarded, for they now reach vast numbers of working-men, upon whose ballots we must all ultimately depend for the safety of whatever amount of property we possess.

Here is a typical quotation from a widely circulated newspaper:

"The persons who are disliked and now even scorned openly are those who have secured by crooked means what in fact belongs to other people. Slowly but surely, in obedience to the immovable instinct of justice, the American people, always wise and reasonable, have concluded that these men have grown rich by manipulation and sharp practices, and are simply thieves. Thieves they are, if they have not given services for their dollars,—if their wealth represents simply a dextrous shuffling of the cards,—and to be a pariah in the secret or openly expressed opinion of millions of one's fellow countrymen is a doom hardly less dreadful than an ignominious death."

These may be dismissed as "wild and whirling words," but they are the counterpart of hundreds of such utterances reaching millions of American voters, and it is sheer folly to close our eyes longer to that grave and momentous fact. So far from frankness being at all incompatible with kindness, it is often the best possible expression of it; and it certainly is so in treating of the very unfortunate situation now occupied by those of our fellow citizens who possess great fortunes. They have come to be regarded, no doubt often most unjustly, as "enemies of the republic,"—men engaged in corrupting our politics, degrading our business, and for their own profits forming illegal trusts and combinations, and thereby robbing the poorer classes of their countrymen of part of the meagre pittance they receive for their hard and irksome toil. Their "surplus wealth," which only a year ago was not only gladly accepted but eagerly solicited, is now in many respectable quarters flouted as "tainted money," that is, money dishonestly obtained, and which no institution or person can accept without sharing in the wrongs by which it was obtained. The common mind seems suddenly to have jumped, so to speak, to the conclusion that these billions of money could not have been honestly earned, and therefore that they have been dishonestly abstracted, in one improper way or another, from the poor. Happily, under

our system of government, even if all this were true, there is not the slightest pretence for resorting to violent methods, because, as has already been shown, lawful methods are ample and can readily and quickly reach any result which the majority of the voters think desirable.

Nor must we be led away by our prejudices as possessors of property, great or small, to consider as novel, and therefore as alarming, the idea of submitting to the majority of the voters the decision as to what laws shall regulate the acquisition and disposal of private property; for, if there was an authority to which a conservative inquirer upon the subject could safely appeal in this matter, it certainly would be to that of a Chief Justice of England, yet here is what Lord Coleridge said:

“In the present day, there is nothing perhaps as to which confusion of thought is greater and more mischievous than as to property itself—the idea, the principle of property, and as to the laws of property, the rules by which the practical enjoyment of property is to be regulated. Now, what is the right of property? The end of property is subsistence, by which end nature has bounded our pretensions to it; hence, in a state of nature, we cannot take more than we use nor hold it longer than we live and are capable of using it. The manner of acquiring property in a state of nature is by occupancy—all other modes of transmitting or acquiring property are acts of positive and civil law, which laws prevent the property of the dead from reverting, as it otherwise would do in a state of nature, to the common stock.

“All the complicated and conflicting systems by which in various civilized countries the powers of the possessors of property, even in various ways, are now narrowed and now enlarged, are systems of positive law, and the right of property has never existed, even in its most absolute form, without some restriction. The right of inheritance, a purely artificial right, has been at different times and in different countries very variously dealt with.

“The same power which prescribes rules for the possession and descent of property can of course alter them, for plain absurdities would follow if this were not so; and the consent of nations and the practice of ages have long since established this simple truth. It has been shown from reason and upon authority that the great and beneficent institution of private property rests only upon the general advantage. The particular rules by which the enjoyment of property is regulated differ in every country in the world and must rest at last upon one and the same foundation, the general advantage; and the defence of any such law of property must ultimately rest on this, that it inures to the general advantage; and in free countries, indeed, I cannot conceive any law standing on any other basis. The object of the restrictions placed in England

for many centuries upon powers of settlement and devise is invariably stated to have been to prevent mischievous accumulations of property in a few hands. It seems, indeed, an elementary proposition that a free people can deal as it thinks fit with its common stock of property, and can prescribe to its citizens such rules as it sees fit for its enjoyment, alienation and transmission.

"A very large coal-owner, some years ago, interfered, with a high hand, in one of the coal strikes. He sent for the workmen. He declined to argue, but he said, stamping his foot upon the ground, 'All the coal within so many square miles is mine, and if you do not instantly come to terms not a hundredweight of it shall be brought to the surface and it shall remain unworked.' This utterance of his was much discussed at the time. By some it was held up as a subject of panegyric and a model for imitation; the manly utterance of one who would stand no nonsense and who was determined to assert his rights of property and to tolerate no interference with them. By others he was denounced as insolent and brutal, and it was suggested that, if a few more men said such things and a few men acted on them, it would very probably result in the coal-owners having not much right of property left to be interfered with. I should myself deny that the mineral treasures placed by Providence under the soil of a country belong to a handful of surface proprietors in the sense in which this gentleman appeared to think that they did. That a few persons would have a right to agree to shut the coal-mines of Great Britain seems to me, I must frankly say, unspeakably absurd.

"The general advantage was in former days absolutely and avowedly regarded, and when rights of private property interfered with them such rights were summarily set aside; and, while property itself was acknowledged, the laws of its enjoyment were regulated according to what was thought to be the general advantage. All laws of property must stand upon the foot of the general advantage, for a country belongs to its inhabitants; and in what proportions and by what rules its inhabitants are to own its property must be settled by the law; and the moment a fragment of the people set up rights as inherent in them and not founded upon the public good, plain absurdities follow, for laws of property are like all other laws, to be changed when the public good requires it. It would be well, indeed, that the owners of property in land or money, from the largest to the smallest, should recognize that their title to the enjoyment of it must rest upon the same foundation, and that the mode and measure of their enjoyment of the common stock of the state, if it injures the state, can no more be defended and will no more be endured by a free people than any other public mischief or nuisance."

We have now heard from two great conservative authorities on the subject of private property, Daniel Webster speaking to an assemblage of conservative New England citizens met to celebrate

the two-hundredth anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims, and Chief-Justice Coleridge addressing an assemblage of conservative lawyers in conservative Scotland.

The Chief Justice tells us that the laws of property "must stand upon the foot of the general advantage," because a country belongs to its inhabitants; and in what proportions and by what rules its inhabitants are to own its property must be settled by the law,—that is, under the free government we enjoy, by a majority of the voters. Mr. Webster tells us that, when we approach the majority of the voters on this subject, we will find that, "in the nature of things, those who have not property and see their neighbors possessed of much more than they think them to need cannot be favorable to laws made for the protection of such property," and he therefore advises us to establish such distribution of property, by the laws which regulate its transmission and alienation, as to interest the great majority of society in the support of the government. The problem before us seems, therefore, to resolve itself into this: Given the existing dissatisfaction of what is presumably a majority of the voters with the vast fortunes which have recently been accumulated, what is the best method of assuaging that discontent and of placing the laws for the enjoyment and inheritance of property upon such reasonable bases as will commend themselves to the majority of the American electorate?

The thing most to be desired in political evolution is that any radical changes which are to be introduced under the forms of law should be introduced gradually, instead of being the result of any sudden access of popular wrath. All students of comparative politics will agree that such sudden access of popular wrath is always to be apprehended in a "top-heavy" society,—that is, a society where a small proportion of the population have, by fair means or foul, appropriated to themselves an undue proportion of the material luxury and prosperity of their epoch, leaving the great toiling masses to become thoroughly permeated with the conviction, not only that they are unjustly treated, but that it has become their sacred duty to terminate such injustice by what Mr. Webster calls "violence and revolution." The suddenness of such revolutions, and their unexpectedness by the victims of them, is one of the commonplaces of history. The small minority at the top, accustomed to enjoy themselves as they please and to

regard those beneath them as permanent mudsills doomed by Providence to work and suffer, in order that they themselves may be idle and luxurious, never seem to have sufficient intelligence to realize the dangers which threaten their privileges and themselves, even when such dangers are close at hand and ought to have been clearly perceived. This was notably the case just before the French Revolution, when not only Arthur Young, whose sympathies were rather with the oppressed and tortured peasantry than with their oppressors, but even Lord Chesterfield, whose sympathies were naturally with the governing class to which he belonged, coming from another country, were able to see the perilous condition in which the royalty and aristocracy of France were then standing, and they substantially agreed that the signs of a great revolution were then to be seen by anybody who had eyes to see them.

As we know, the wealthy classes of France believed themselves to be entirely secure in the possession of all their properties and privileges and could not see their danger. This same story has just been repeated in the Russian Revolution. The Russian autocracy a year ago believed themselves to be in secure possession of all their properties and privileges, and they fully expected that the Russian workmen and peasants would continue contentedly to labor for future generations, in order that they should continue to enjoy themselves as they pleased; and yet we have all seen to what a sudden and terrible awakening their blindness subjected them. Many unkind observers insist that our millionaires have been stricken with just such blindness; but it must be remembered that, this being actually a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people," ballots will here prove far more effective in reaching any result the majority of the voters may desire as to the possession and distribution of property, than could possibly be secured by any number of dynamite bombs; so that the danger confronting us is that the majority of American voters will effect their wishes by very extreme and and very dangerous legislation, unless they are guided in safer paths.

As this article is being written the American Federation of Labor announces that it is about to enter politics, showing that here, as in most other countries, the laboring classes are taking their place in practical politics with leaders who believe in their

cause and who have a devoted and enthusiastic following. Such being the case, it is apparent that the important middle class of the American people, who possess only a moderate amount of property, will find it quite impossible to stem the advancing tide demanding a radical readjustment of the distribution of property, unless our millionaires promptly and efficiently come to their assistance. It has, indeed, become the duty of every true lover of his country, to whatever class he belongs, to look the existing situation of American politics frankly and courageously in the face, and to be prepared to make whatever sacrifices are needful to find, if possible, some common basis of a sane agreement upon the subject. Such an agreement must offer every proper inducement to the capacity and the energy of every American citizen, to exert himself and all his abilities to the utmost degree consistent with the general welfare; and he should be encouraged to believe that the acquisition and descent of such reasonable accumulations of private property as his energies and ability can honestly secure will remain perfectly safe, under the protecting ægis of the law.

These considerations naturally bring us to the *cruz* of the situation, which is, as has been stated, the popular estimation of the absence of any moral title of our millionaires to the billions of money they have either themselves succeeded in abstracting from the common store or have inherited from ancestors who had so abstracted it. It must always be remembered that it is naturally very difficult for the owners of "surplus wealth" to recognize that any ethical basis whatever for their alleged ownership of their property can be necessary. To their minds, it represents what they call "vested interests," and the world has so long lived and prospered upon this theory that it seems equally startling and inadmissible to demand now that a man possessing millions of money should be called upon to show that his ownership of them is rightful, not only in his own view, but in the view of the majority of his fellow men. In all the past ages, such basis was so far from being demanded that the exact contrary gave a perfectly defensible title. A king's mistress could not only confer such a title to a vast extent of lands, but she could also introduce her complaisant family into the inner circles of the land's nobility. A king's friendship was a satisfactory basis, as is easily shown in many cases, by tracing titles to land and rank back to



their sources. A courtier's subservience in evil ways to the court was such a basis. A soldier's courage on the field of battle gave a far better title, though still a title based upon the will of a master and not upon the consent of the people. Those were the days when each man was avowedly for himself, seizing all he could extort from others, and the devil was solicited to take the hindmost.

But we have now changed all that, and no title to property or privilege of any kind can to-day have any other sufficient basis than that named by Lord Coleridge—that such title is “consonant with the general advantage,”—all other sources of title to property and privilege having disappeared before the growth of the modern idea of equality of rights, as the mists of the morning before the sun. The virile, growing, controlling nations of the earth have all practically accepted manhood suffrage, and on that basis their governments rest. Each man, by reason of his manhood alone and without the slightest reference to the amount of property he possesses, has an equal voice with every other man in making the laws governing their common country and regulating the distribution of the common property. Such a consummation was devoutly to be wished; but all desirable situations of every kind are liable to present some undesirable aspects, and one of the undesirable aspects of a situation conferring absolute equality of political rights upon every man in the community is the danger that it will be supposed by thoughtless and ill-regulated minds that equality of political rights necessarily involves equality in the possession of property. This is the underlying and attractive idea of Socialism, but such an assumption, as is well known, violates one of the primal facts in the history of man—the immense and incalculable differences which exist in men's natural capacities for rendering honest service to society. Encouragement should be given, in the interest of society itself, to every man to use all the gifts he possesses to the fullest extent possible, in every channel of usefulness, so far as such use is compatible with the welfare of the majority of his fellow men. To each of us is now being repeated the fateful question which Cain asked: “Am I my brother's keeper?” and each of us must answer: “Yes, I am my brother's keeper, to the extent that I am not at liberty to take a dollar unjustly from him, nor to accumulate a dollar of property for myself ex-

cept with full, careful and generous consideration of what is due to him."

Such an admission as this by our millionaires, and consistent action upon it, would do much, even at this late day, to assist in preventing the success of wild schemes of confiscation, although unhappily the protection of private property in America no longer rests upon voters born here and bred in our atmosphere of conservatism, where respect for private property was a part of the breath of their lives. Our millionaires are accused, among other things, of not being contented with the great gains they were making from their railways, their mines and their manufactories when relying upon the labor of American voters, and of degrading our suffrage yearly by deluging us with hundreds of thousands of laborers, whom they persuade to come here from the least desirable classes of Europe, and who, only too soon after their arrival, secure for themselves the right of suffrage, thus distinctly lowering the political intelligence and the political sobriety of our electorate and distinctly and swiftly impairing the security of all private possessions.

They are also accused of dealing another blow at the security of private property. Such security must finally rest upon respect for law, and such respect, if it had not been impaired, would have furnished a very valuable bulwark against every form of Socialism and civil anarchy, however disguised. It is said that our millionaires have initiated and for many years maintained a regular and growing system of political corruption, taking no other interest in our politics than that of drawing checks for the avowed purpose of debasing and degrading the voters, and teaching them that their votes ought to bring them plunder in some form or other. No worse training in evil could possibly have been devised; but it is very unfair to blame our millionaires too severely for this unwise and wicked use of their "surplus wealth," as we all encouraged such contributions, even from the sacred funds of life-insurance companies. Such contributions are now claimed to have hypnotized Presidents and Cabinet members and Congressmen, thereby securing protection for illegal trusts and monopolies and maintaining such a tariff as enables our millionaires to raise the prices of the articles they sell as high as they choose, while they also obtain absolute free trade in labor, so that they can always flood the labor market, as they have done in

the anthracite-coal regions, with a supply far beyond any reasonable demand and thus keep the wages of labor as low as they choose.

Now, as long as no complaints were heard, and the laboring people had no leaders and above all no literature, questioning the wisdom and the justice of allowing great fortunes to be thus acquired, it was possible to go on living as we have been doing, repeating to each other that everything was for the best in this best of all possible worlds, and that there was no need for any change whatever; but, as we have seen, this halcyon situation has suddenly changed and this serene sky is filled with threatening clouds.

It is certainly timely, therefore, to consider whether we cannot find some basis for private property, which ought, and might even yet, receive the approval of a majority of the American electorate. Suppose we should try the harmless experiment of applying some practical ethical test whereby the rightfulness of each man's possessions could be somewhat fairly, even if roughly, judged on moral grounds or grounds of "the general advantage." If honestly desiring such a test, we would probably find it in a fair and reasonable equivalent of service to the people for the money withdrawn from the people; and for the purpose of suggestion only an illustration of this ethical proposition might be found in the amount of the salary of the President of the United States. He is supposed to be a person of the very first order, alike in character and in capacity, and equal in both respects to the ablest of our millionaires; and he is charged with as grave, multifarious and onerous duties as can fall to the lot of any living man. Now, for a man of that high order and for his exclusive devotion to such engrossing and far-reaching duties as the office entails the American people, by their chosen representatives, have adjudged fifty thousand dollars a year, and the defraying of certain expenses incident to the office, to be a fair and reasonable compensation for his best service. In other words, such a man and such services would be treated in an algebraic formula as equal to fifty thousand dollars a year and the outlays already mentioned; and the American people have decided that, in Lord Coleridge's words, it is for "the general advantage" that such should be the compensation of the President of the United States. Why should any other citizen either wish or be permitted to

withdraw from the common store a larger annual sum? A man gifted with exceptional ability, who has devoted many years of his life to perfecting a most useful invention, comes to the American people and says: "I have discovered something which will be greatly to your advantage. What compensation ought I fairly to receive for it?" And the chosen representatives of the people, speaking for them, answer: "It is for 'the general advantage' to encourage useful inventions, and therefore if we find your invention useful we will give you the exclusive right to the profits of it for fourteen years, at the end of which time it shall become public property." A person with very unusual ability for initiating and managing a great industrial enterprise, or a great banking house, or a great system of transportation, or a great department store, comes to the American people and says: "I wish to devote myself to your service. What will you allow me to withdraw from the common property for such service?" For the sake of argument only, suppose the American people in their generosity answer each of these able men: "Well, we will give you as much as we give the President of the United States; and, while we only give him that compensation at most for eight years, we will give it to you for all the active years of your life, so that if you live fairly long and are a good husbandman of your means you ought to be able, besides living luxuriously, to leave a million dollars at your death."

If a manager of an industrial enterprise should say: "But I have other abilities besides those you have considered—I have ability to corrupt the traffic-managers of great railways and thus secure rebates for my enterprise," the answer would have to be that securing rebates is a public wrong. If a banker said: "I have a great talent for combining different corporations into one mass, thus creating a monopoly for the new enterprise and trebling its capitalization," the answer would have to be that monopolies have always been odious even at the common law and are expressly forbidden by our statute law. If the proprietor of a department store should say: "My ability will enable me to drive thousands of independent shopkeepers and tradesmen out of business and compel them to enter the ranks of those who work for wages," the answer must be that such conduct, so far from being a public advantage, is a public disadvantage; and so throughout the long list of able, agile and more or less unscrupulous captains

of one kind of industry or another, or one kind of finance or another, who offer their services to the American people. They ought to be fully compensated for everything they do which is, in the words of Lord Coleridge, "for the general advantage," and it is undoubtedly for the general advantage that their unusual abilities should be utilized, just so far as the utilization of them is compatible with the general welfare; but the use of their abilities ought to be sternly and rigorously prohibited whenever they exercise them to the general disadvantage and abstract money not morally due from the people to put into their own pockets.

A man presents himself and says: "I have discovered a place down in the earth where Providence has made a deposit of coal or iron or precious metals—what will you give me for my services in superintending the bringing of them to market?" Another man presents himself and says: "I have traversed a region which Providence has blessed with a fertile soil and other sources of traffic for a railway—what will you give me for persuading capital to enable me to build the railway and for managing it after it is built?" As neither has anything to offer but his services, might not the annual compensation of the President of the United States be a generous annual compensation for each of them? And if that would be a generous compensation, certainly neither of them can possess any moral title to more.

It is difficult to see how any real injustice would be done to any honest member of society, or how undue restraint would be put upon any ability or energy of a beneficent character, if the law encouraged every man to earn for himself, say, a yearly income of fifty thousand dollars and to acquire a solid fortune of a million dollars. Such sums would allow not only an ample but a very generous provision for everybody dependent upon him while he lived and after he was dead; and it is difficult to realize what more the heart of any man could desire, who recognizes that he is a part of a Christian society and not a pirate on the Barbary coast.

If that view should be ever accepted, there will be no practical difficulty in framing laws, either State or Federal, which would impose such a scale of progressive taxation on both incomes and inheritances as would discourage the appropriation by any man, by one evil device or another, of unearned millions of money from the common property of the community; and, so

far from such laws operating unkindly or harshly upon our millionaires themselves, they might be found to confer upon them the greatest possible benefit, and to give them such peace and happiness as they can never enjoy while holding fast to fortunes which the majority of their fellow men have come to believe to be "tainted money."

A great deal of utter nonsense has been talked about the necessity of allowing predatory persons of a burglarious disposition to take from society whatever sums they can, "by hook or by crook," secure, as otherwise it is said their astounding abilities would not be put to use. It is a strange and indeed a degrading delusion to suppose that, judged by any moral standard, either the desire or the capacity to amass a large fortune can be anything but a public calamity. On all ethical subjects the great poets are singularly gifted in seeing the truth and singularly brave in speaking it. Virgil wrathfully exclaims:

"Accursed thirst for wealth, to what do you not drive the minds of men!"

and centuries later Tennyson wrathfully exclaims:

"Pickpockets, each hand lusting for all that is not its own,  
And lust of gain in the spirit of Cain!"

The truth is that no genuine service in any department of human effort has ever been conferred upon mankind merely for the sake of money, nor is any person who is desirous of having "money to burn" capable of rendering any really valuable service. The two qualities of mind always have been and always will be incompatible. The good work of the world has never been done from such an incentive. The good men of the world have never done any work from such an incentive. Excessive gains, like excessive salaries, are inherently dishonest, and the men who seek them cannot possibly be of any genuine value to the American people. The less temptation, therefore, we offer men to work merely to amass great fortunes the better for them and for us, and the more sternly we confine everybody to honest returns for honest service the better for them and for us. Whoever has a dollar for which a dollar's worth, in property or service, has not been given, has a dishonest dollar, and if he keeps it, he is a dishonest man, no matter by what fine phrases he seeks to cover such dishonesty.

And a dishonest man can confer no real benefit upon an honest community.

The time, indeed, is perhaps not distant when everybody possessing private property will be required to answer these two plain questions: "How much have you withdrawn from the common store?" and "What service did you give in return for it?" An honest man who has given an honest equivalent for the money he has received can readily answer both these questions, and in all the diversified ranks of American energy and industry there are great multitudes of men who can promptly and satisfactorily show a dollar's worth of honest service for every dollar they have received; and doubtless some of the possessors of great fortunes can render such an accounting for a part of the "surplus wealth" they possess; but to do so they must rigidly eliminate all illegal, corrupt, immoral or demoralizing activities in which they have engaged. If the elimination of all accretions to their fortunes by such means reduces their millions to reasonable limits, they ought in justice to themselves to make the necessary sacrifice involved in such reduction. If they would do so, there is no doubt they would be met in a corresponding spirit by all classes of their fellow citizens, and an enduring basis would be secured for the honest exercise of individualism in all departments of activity, and for the placing of all the rewards thus earned upon a basis of enduring security.

If, however, our millionaires prefer to remain as they have hitherto chosen to remain, outside the current of the national life, leaving its politics to take care of themselves except when they draw checks, and cherishing the fond delusion which the possessors of unearned wealth have so often cherished, that the growing dissatisfaction with them and their possessions, and the methods by which they were acquired, is merely a temporary excitement and in their favorite phrase "will soon blow over,"—then it may be stated, with entire confidence and without the slightest exaggeration, that they are destined to a very early and unwelcome awakening, when they will find themselves confronted with the transfer of the government with all its great powers for good and for evil into the hands of men of a very limited conception of "vested interests," and whose minds will be inflamed with a wrath which they will consider righteous and a hostility which may prove to be implacable. Unless, therefore,

some moral basis for what the majority of voters believe to be the present grossly unjust inequality in the distribution of property in this country is soon found,—a moral basis which will prove acceptable to the majority of American voters,—we may encounter in the coming Presidential election a situation infinitely more disturbing and infinitely more dangerous than has ever before been encountered. It seems the dictate alike of interest and of patriotism for each of us, whatever his class, to do all in his power to prevent such a calamity; and, even should our united efforts ultimately fail to check the advancing tide of Socialism and to place the right of individual citizens to acquire and retain all property honestly earned by them upon an impregnable legal basis, it would surely always be a consoling reflection to have borne a part in so good a fight for so good a purpose. Such an opportunity if now rejected may never return for:

“The moving finger writes, and having writ  
Moves on.”

X.